

first drive

refined and refreshed

Just in time for its 30th birthday, the Polo has had a facelift worthy of the best Hollywood clinic. But, with minor mechanical revisions, are the changes more than skin deep?

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The VW Polo Register would like to thank Paul Buckett and Mike Orford of the Volkswagen UK Press Office. For more information on the new Polo range, please visit www.volkswagen.co.uk



Age-defying facelifts and cosmetic treatments have long been the rage in the clinics of LA and Hollywood, with starlets of all ages heading to the hills to rejuvenate and refresh their looks. Volkswagen has recently taken the scalpel to the Polo, and it has emerged looking rejuvenated, refreshed and a little more mature – bucking the usual younger-looking facelift trend. But, with minor changes to the mechanicals and the interior, do the refinements improve the car, and are they enough to keep the Polo ahead of other, less glamorous supermini rivals?

Appearing at the Leipzig Motor Show in April, and launched onto the UK market on June 10, the latest version of the Polo gains the new corporate nose first seen on the new Passat, and features other styling features influenced by other models in the Volkswagen family. The new front-end looks are very striking and cohesive, and work very well, lending the car a much more aggressive look. The new 'V'-shaped grille does not appear in chrome as was initially thought by the motoring press, but the range-topping Sport models gain chrome-trimmed grille bars, framing that now upmarket VW roundel. The twin headlight units and the pulled-back bonnet line are the undoubted contributors to the meaner look, and when all of these elements are viewed

All change (left, above and right): new Polo retains the look of the old, but with freshened front and rear lamps, new tailgate, bonnet, bumpers, and front wings, revised car has a more upmarket look. Front end now looks meaner and more mature. Sport 1.9 TDI has 99bhp and costs £13,190.



as a whole, the car does not appear to be a recently facelifted one. The 'V' shape continues up the bonnet, meeting the front pillars, leading into the door mirrors with their integral side repeaters. The rear changes amount to a new LED-style set of rear lamps – again echoing current Volkswagen design themes – and a new tailgate, with another 'V' shape, this time in the rear window's trailing edge. Moving the badges down in line with the bottom of the lamps, complete the changes. With a sprinkling of new alloy wheel and wheel cover designs, the transformation is complete. The car now looks confident, even more upmarket, and finally has the face it was always deserving of, since its 2001 launch. ►



'The Polo now looks confident and even more upmarket'

◀ The interior changes are not so far reaching, with only fabrics, steering wheels and instrument graphics being revised. However, there was nothing much wrong with the cabin in the first place, and the quality is still above what its rivals can offer, if not (in some areas) what is truly expected of a Volkswagen.

At a recent Volkswagen UK Press Office Regional Driving Activity, we tested four new variants of the revised Polo range. We started with the 1.2-litre S with 62bhp. We then worked through the test models, driving the new 1.4 TDI with 79bhp in the same trim level, the 1.4-litre petrol-engined model in SE trim with 74bhp, and finally, the 1.9-litre TDI Sport with 99bhp.

The new 2006 Polos have little-changed mechanicals, with only a firming up to the suspension and more off-centre feel to the electro-mechanical steering being the only modifications. Indeed, as before, the new models responded well to being punted into a corner, with only the 1.4 TDI seeming a little unbalanced. Roll is well-controlled, and although the steering offers little in the way of feel, the car can be easily placed on the road, and goes exactly where it's pointed. Brakes are very strong, as before, and hydraulic brake assist (HBA) and ESP stability control are offered as options on all models. ABS is standard in line with new EU laws.

Kicking off with the 1.2-litre S 3dr, costing £9,250, initial impressions were good. Being a three-cylinder unit, the thrum is endearing, and encourages pressing on style driving. The ride is on the firm side, as it is on all of the revised models, but coupled with good bump absorption, the new Polo soaks up all road imperfections with little – if any – intrusion into the cabin. This level of refinement, together with the general noise levels, translates into a very

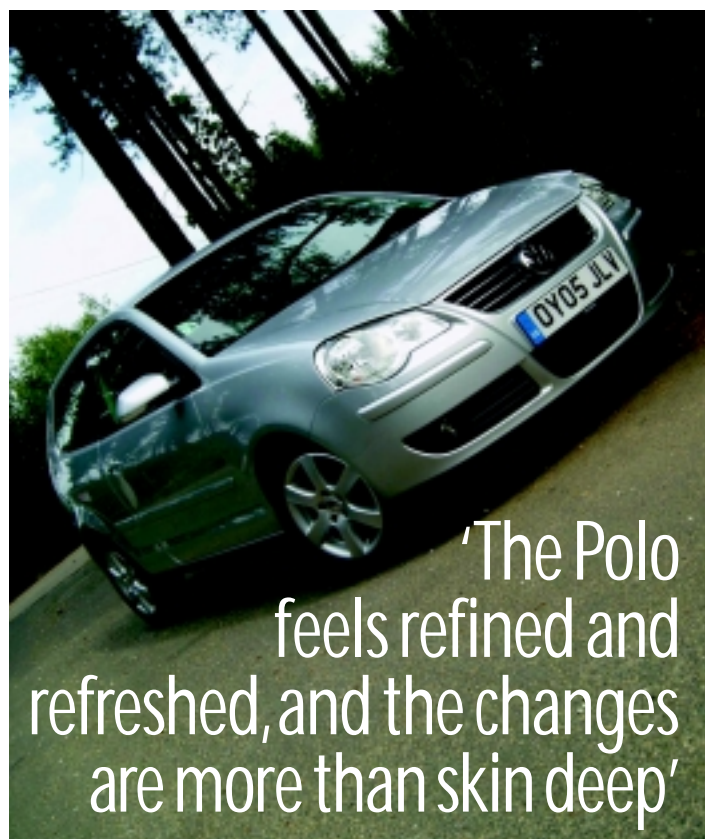
composed and refined little car. In fact, it's one of, if not *the* favourite of the entire range for us.

The 1.4-litre TDI model is also a three-cylinder unit, and although much the same as before, revisions have seen the engine gain more power. The £11,325 S 5dr was identical in specification to the 1.2 3dr car tested first, but felt very different. The suspension seemed floaty and very bumpy – almost at odds with the rest of the car. Disappointing, with the amount of performance available.

The 1.4 petrol-engined car fared much better, and was much more on a par with the earlier 1.2-litre car to drive and place in corners. The £10,820 SE 5dr is pitched as a mid-range model, and as such, adds remote central locking with alarm, and 14" 'Misano' alloy wheels over the S model.

The final car we tested was the 1.9-litre Sport with 99bhp. Costing £13,190, front fog lights, 15" 'Charade' alloy wheels, a chrome-trimmed grille, and sports seats add to the kit count over the SE. With the addition of (standard) sports suspension, the Sport felt 'nuggety', planted and just as refined as the petrol models. It does give enough of a sports feeling for most drivers most of the time. A GTI model *is* coming later with 148bhp and a 1.8T engine.

Overall then, the one word that sums up the new Polo range is refined. It feels refined and refreshed. The changes *are* more than skin deep, and should be enough to defend it against the new and facelifted rivals that it will have to face over the coming months. With a replacement for the Polo Dune also coming, this reworking should see the Polo safe until the all-new model in 2008. **VWPR**



'The Polo feels refined and refreshed, and the changes are more than skin deep'